



Original Research Article

Ensemble work as a 21st century model for the Doctorate in Education nontraditional Dissertation in Practice (DiP) at Lynn University

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The purpose of this article was to demonstrate the ensemble work of 11 doctoral students (known as Cohort 5) as a 21st century model for the Doctorate in Education nontraditional Dissertation in Practice (DiP) at Lynn University in Boca Raton, FL. The research provided an opportunity to explore three objectives: (1) The first objective was to explore how the entire Cohort 5 decided upon the process. (2) The second objective was to describe how the entire Cohort 5 navigated challenges to become an ensemble. (3) The third objective was to discuss the challenges to complete the process of the nontraditional DiP into one ensemble work instead of several small group traditional DiPs. This article used a case study as the research strategy thus collected and analyzed qualitative data. The researchers analyzed and interpreted the findings to demonstrate the ensemble style group collaboration of 11 doctoral students can succeed as a 21st century model for the Ed.D. nontraditional DiP.

Key words: Educational cohorts, doctoral students, educational doctorate, group dissertation

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to demonstrate the ensemble work of 11 doctoral students as a 21st century model for the Doctorate in Education Dissertation in Practice (DiP) at Lynn University in Boca Raton, FL.

The Problem

The traditional five chapter doctoral dissertation process has been described by Shulman (as cited in Brown-Ferrigno and Jenson, 2012) as “a marathon designed to measure who has the stamina to stay the course, but not particularly useful for the real work that individuals with doctorates are called upon to do”. Instead of succumbing to this marathon approach, there is a new movement emphasizing common standards, collegiality and usefulness. This new movement is typically called closed cohort delivery model and

individualized DiP approach. A key essential to the cohort model is when students develop relational trust through working together, stimulating peer group support and group identity. It effectively avoids the sense of isolation common among Ph.D. students but there are also pressures of different kinds not seen in the traditional five chapter approach where variety, individuality, depth of understanding and even idiosyncrasy constitutes conventional practices. The new movement makes doctoral work more accountable, to the institution, to the society, to the government, and also to the student (Barnett, 2000). The new movement is supported by an organization called the Carnegie Project on Educational Doctorate (CPED). One of the new cohort options for completing a doctorate that CPED recommends is a nontraditional group dissertation.

Most higher education CPED cohorts deciding to undertake a group styled dissertation in practice (DiP) choose to divide up the cohort into several small groups

whom select a topic to complete (and it is optional whether or not the topics for each small group bear any relation to one another). An alternative approach is an ensemble style collaboration that produces one collective effort. This approach is not popular yet primarily because it requires a higher degree of teamwork, it poses additional challenges, and concerns if too much is on the line should it fail and turn into a wasted effort.

Definitions of Terms

Carnegie Project on Educational Doctorate (CPED)

Carnegie Project on Educational Doctorate is a consortium of over 88 colleges and schools of education, which have committed to critically examine the doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) through dialogue, experiment, critical feedback and evaluation (<http://www.cpedinitiative.org/about>).

Cohort Model – An intact group of students who proceed together throughout the DiP process (Barnett and Muse, 1993).

CPED Background – The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council of Academic Deans in Research Education Institutions has partnered to sponsor the CPED “to reclaim the education doctorate and to transform it into the degree of choice for the next generation of school and college leaders” (Schulman, 2005, www.cpedinitiative.org). CPED designed a new educator preparatory Ed.D. DiP to make it consistent with 21st century trends and relevant to practitioners. 88 colleges and schools of education have transformed doctoral education to meet the practitioner’s needs through emphasis on “(a) scholarship of teaching, (b) identification of a signature pedagogy, (c) creation of laboratories of practice that undertake best evidence analyses, and (d) development of new capstone experiences in which Ed.D. candidates can work together to demonstrate their proficiencies in scholarship” (Brown-Ferrigno and Jenson, 2009). CPED encourages developing group styled DiP designs, too. The differentiating components include (1) the cohort model, (2) the flexibility and adaptability of learning experiences, (3) outcomes in response to dynamics shifts in the workplace, and (4) the development of a highly reflective, well prepared scholarly practitioners at the conclusion of a three year journey.

Dissertation in Practice (DiP) – Defined by Shulman (2005) as “the culminating experience that demonstrates the practitioner’s scholarly ability to solve problems of practice, the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) exhibits the

doctoral candidate’s ability to think, to perform, and act with integrity” (Schulman, 2005).

Ed.D. – Doctorate in Education. “The professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession” (Perry, 2012).

Ensemble – According to Trumbull (2008), the term of *ensemble* represents a sense of wholeness – everyone working together as a unit toward a common goal like a well-oiled machine (Trumbull, 2008, www.novaonline.nvcc.edu). In this study, *ensemble* refers in particular to the entire Cohort 5 of 11 students of the Ed.D. program at Lynn University.)

Purposive Total Population Sampling – is a type of purposive sampling technique for examining a small entire group possessing a specific set of characteristics (Lund, 2012).

Research Question

How can ensemble style group collaboration succeed as a 21st century model for the Ed.D. DiP at Lynn University?

Research Objectives

The above research question provided an opportunity to explore three objectives in the pursuit of an answer.

- (1) How the entire Cohort 5 decided upon the process of doing a nontraditional DiP.
- (2) How the entire Cohort 5 navigated challenges to become an ensemble.
- (3) The challenges to complete the process of nontraditional DiP into one ensemble work instead of several small group traditional DiPs

METHODOLOGY

Setting

Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida is a CPED partner who recently added group dissertations as an option for a nontraditional group DiP. Founded in 1962, Lynn strives for “recognition as one of the most innovative, international and individualized small universities in America” (Lynn university, 2005). According to Lynn University President, Dr. Kevin Ross, “Since launching Lynn’s 21st Century Strategic Plan in 2006, we have made remarkable progress” (Ross, 2011, www.lynn.edu). This strategic plan suggests

Table 1. The Research Demographic Characteristic of Participants

Research Demographics		
Participants	● 11 participants (including nine males and two females) in total	
Gender	● All 11 participants are adults (according to laws, <i>adult</i> means 18 years old or above)	
Age	20-29 years old	1
	30-39 years old	3
	40-49 years old	4
	50-59 years old	3
Ethnicity	Caucasian American	2
	Black, African, Jamaican or Haitian American	6
	Asian Chinese	1
	Hispanic, or Cuban American	2

that Lynn can design itself to be a new, distinctive, and different kind of modern house of doctoral education – one that is “boldly oriented to the global society of the future and that breaks out of the collegiate assumptions of yesteryear” (Lynn university, 2005). Lynn University capitalizes on an affluent, attractive South Florida location while focusing on close student and faculty bonds to become an innovative different kind of 21st century learning center.

Students who enroll in Lynn’s Ed.D. program usually are full-time educators who desire a doctoral program that will prepare them to (a) apply theory and curriculum to their professional practice, (b) learn how to better solve in-the-trench challenges, and (c) simultaneously remain active at their employment while earning their doctorate (Perry, 2011). Through the curriculum of an Ed.D. program and the implementation of the capstone experience, doctoral candidates may develop the skills and knowledge necessary to become productive scholarly practitioners and garner the same level of respect as those students pursuing terminal degrees in other programs.

Selection of participants

In August of 2013, 11 students designated as “Cohort 5” embarked on undertaking the scholastic work required to earn a doctoral degree in educational leadership and administration. In November 2013, these scholarly practitioners were Lynn University’s first cohort to begin the journey from initially building cohort relationships, to transitioning into a small group styled dissertation phase. By March 2014, the eleven doctoral students Lynn’s first cohort to collaborate to form an ensemble style DiP. Therefore, this is a purposive total population sample (Yin, 2011).

Demographic characteristic of participants

The study demographics were diverse. The participants consisted of 11 people including nine males and two females. All 11 participants are adults. Specifically, one is 20-29 years old, three are 30-39 years old, four are 40-49

years old, and three are 50-59 years old. Meanwhile, two are Caucasian American, six are Black (African, Jamaican and Haitian American), one is Asian, and two are Hispanic, or Cuban American. Noted below, Table 1 illustrates the research demographic characteristic of participants.

Data collection methods

This study adopted the multi-method qualitative approach to collect and analyze data. Purposive sampling was utilized to collect and analyze total population data. The data have been collected in various ways: emails, photos, and videos are the main method of collection that was utilized by the cohort. Additionally, the e-mails, photos, and videos serve as on-going archival or historical records collected/documentated by two members of the cohort who served as historians. Other technological tools such as Dropbox, Weebly, Google Docs, and ooVoo were also used as supplement off campus.

Data analysis

The resulting data were analyzed by arranging into timeline “transitions” and subcategories with titles such as “decision making” or “evidence of collaborative student engagement”, and “instructional interventions”. The method for this kind data analysis was reorganizing data first, and then analyzing the data to search for key themes and patterns or relationships in them about the research question and research objectives. The purpose is to present the findings discovered in the study process, so that the findings may be useful for the readers and further study, share the research stages, and data analysis process. The findings were categorized based upon each research objective.

FINDINGS

How Did the Entire Cohort 5 Decide Upon the Process?

Finding 1– front loading theory. At the forefront of this

process, productive collaboration was established to ensure on-going conversations. To support this important component, in August 2013, the dissertation chair, Dr. Taylor-Dunlop initially provided EDU 701, "Leadership Policy and Context". This is a course that systematically examines the structure and function of educational policies and problems of research in a political context. Students delved into problems of practice and leadership theory through a progressive series of ten forums. Each forum focused on topics such as "Leadership and Professional Capital", "The Value of Relational Trust", "Elmore's Internal Coherence", "New Structures for Leadership in a New Age" and "Florida Leadership".

During the course the cohort worked on class assignments in small groups, two large groups and finally the entire cohort collaborated to produce a 65 page final analytical paper titled "Team Strategic Representation". The developmental team processes the cohort experienced were positive and rewarding. The course was the forerunner to, and set the stage for the decision to embark upon the journey of an ensemble style group DiP.

Finding 2 – selection of DiP topic. In November, 2013, Cohort 5 agreed to a nontraditional group dissertation in practice topic entitled "Rethinking 21st Century Educational Leadership". Organizing a cohort to effectively collaborate with each other for a two-year period is challenging. Spirited teamwork is required. Each cohort member was accountable to maintain sufficient productiveness and professionalism while endeavoring to capably succeed in a manner compatible with the other team members.

Finding 3 – norms. The cohort created and prioritized seven norms on December 22nd, 2013. These are (1) Create a safe environment, (2) Be present, committed and accountable to the team, (3) Be professional about and respectful of diverse view-points, (4) Be open to constructive feedback, (5) Honor deadlines, (6) Ask for support when needed and ask questions, and (7) Be creative, imaginative, and have fun. These norms were frequently revisited in order to ensure that all members were fulfilling their roles and obligations to the team.

Finding 4 – generating a list of topics essential to 21st century educational settings. In order to efficiently work through the development of the DiP, the cohort divided up the tasks that each member would be responsible for, and then split into small groups of one, two or three team members to begin the research. Centered on the researched interests noted below, cohort members embarked on producing a comprehensive literature review.

Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) – is developing the skills and knowledge necessary to

become productive scholarly practitioners.

Ethical Leadership – is a complex field of practice that seeks to develop solutions for ethical educational practices and inclusion of the community

Culturally Responsive Leadership – is based on social justice and educational equity for all students.

21st Century Skills – is based on critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and technological skills.

Curriculum and Instruction Leadership – is 21st century leadership that changes their approach of teaching to match different learning styles.

Technology Leadership – is knowing the necessity and scope of 21st century skills for students, teachers, and leaders drives the field of technology leadership.

Finding 5 – selection of additional DiP projects. Cohort 5 observed that the original Ed.D. program printed handbook that each cohort member received during orientation on August 23rd, 2013 requires upgrading to an internet compatible, publishable Apple iBook, that provided adequate answers in an electronic format for prospective 21st century doctoral students. Eventually the creation of an iBook would constitute an integral component for the ensemble style dissertation. Additional components rounding out the DiP are an executive summary, comprehensive literature review, and two publishable articles authored by each cohort member and in some instances groups of two. An ensemble presentation of the iBook and comprehensive literature review served as the dissertation proposal defense.

Finding 6 – selection and development of iBook. The content selection for the Ed.D. informational iBook is separated into ten chapters. Each member selected the content for the iBook based on what the cohort, as 21st century educators themselves thought was important for professional doctoral students applying to Lynn University Ed.D. program. The chapters of the iBook are in order, as followed: The Welcome, About Lynn, CPED, Academic Program, Why Lynn, The Journey, Faculty, Alumni, Lynn Community, and Admissions/Financial Aid. Cohort 5 members talked about how to divide iBook into sub topics of interest for further research on December 17th, 2013. Cohort 5 started working on extensive research regarding those sub topics in the iBook in small groups on January 11th, 2014.

How Did the Entire Cohort 5 Navigate Challenges to Become an Ensemble?

Finding 1 – assigning roles and tasks. In order to

efficiently work through the development of the DiP – the cohort divided up the tasks that each member would be responsible for, and then split into small groups of one, two or three team members to begin the research. During these initial collaborative sessions at the beginning of the nontraditional group DiP, Cohort 5 established several key roles. For example one role was the “Historians”, for the collection and documentation of day to day operations throughout the process. Photos were taken by a cohort member to capture visual moments and to display significant information. Classroom discussions and dialogue between cohort members was videotaped. Qualitative archival data such as photos, emails, articles and collaboration between colleagues were collected and organized. Minutes of the meetings were taken & disseminated to the members of Cohort 5.

Two doctoral candidates were chosen to consolidate the topics of interest articles into a comprehensive literature review that maintained a central theme throughout. Another four students participated in reviewing the iBook for revisions.

Finding 2 – agendas. Agendas were created in order to keep the DiP moving forward in a timely manner. For example, each small group would demonstrate their first group research article to the cohort on January 25th, 2014, and their second group research article to the cohort by February 1st, 2014.

In March 2014, Cohort 5 began extending into an eleven member ensemble that involved all cohort members collaboratively working together on the first ensemble group publishable article (based on small group research findings and literature reviews consolidated and synthesized together into a group comprehensive piece) entitled “A Comprehensive Literature Review – Using CPED Principles and Vision to Rethink 21st Century Educational Leadership”.

Finding 3 – technical challenges. On behalf of Cohort 5, one cohort member participated in a one day iBook training on November 16th, 2013. Afterwards, that cohort member trained Cohort 5 on November 23rd, 2013 in an on campus classroom containing twenty Apple computers (Room 205, ASSAF, Lynn University) on how to create an Apple iBook. On December 6th, 2013, Dr. Taylor-Dunlop announced that each cohort member will receive a mini iPad in early January, 2014 via the support of the Lynn University administration. On January 11th, 2014, Apple Mini iPads were issued.

Additionally, utilizing 21st century technology, online protocols and iCloud Weebly began use on January 18th, 2014 as supplement tools to facilitate iBook creation. The

cohort learned to navigate collaboration on and off campus. The team together using Google Docs, e-mail, video-iPhone and class collaborations to ensure that all members equally participated in the creation of the iBook. The process required a considerable adjustment in schedules and strategic communication methodology for the cohort to meet when monthly weekend class were not in session. It highlighted how important careful structuring of student experiences and faculty support was for the benefit of positive group collaborative relations.

Finding 4 – revisions. After the content of the iBook was gathered and downloaded into the Apple program, the revisions of the iBook took on many forms. The next step was to ensure that the content that was gathered by each member as an individual or group met the copyright laws. Much research was gathered to assure all photos, slides, and text be cited correctly. For example, throughout the iBook a variety of pictures from other cohorts enrolled in the Lynn University doctoral program were taken on and around April 12th, 2014. In May, grammar and spell check correction were undertaken in the entire iBook.

What were the Challenges to Complete the Process of Nontraditional DiP into One Ensemble Work Instead of Several Small Group Traditional DiPs?

Finding 1– administration and faculty challenges. The administration and faculty at Lynn University recognized the group dissertation experience encompassed entirely different challenges than preparing each student to embark upon their own traditional five chapter dissertation. In addition to the Dissertation Chair, the cohort’s four “critical friends” faculty members at Lynn University provided timely instructional intervention at key junctures during the process. Their guidance provided strategies to support transformative learning toward Ed.D. completion. Their assistance supporting the closed cohort model prepared the cohort for the realities of collaborative professional practice in the 21st century.

Finding 2 – ensemble presentation challenges. Cohort 5 students took ensemble photos and filmed videos at the Lynn production studio titled “Why Lynn” on June 8th, 2014. From November 2014 through January 9, 2015 the cohort prepared an ensemble presentation for purposes of their proposal defense, current and future presentations to other Lynn University cohorts, departments and CPED. All the usual necessities of production work were required, such as devising and editing of individual scripts for each cohort member; devising and editing an ensemble multimedia PowerPoint; memorization, run through and dress

rehearsals; sound, lighting and videotaping. Student engagement challenges to complete these tasks included cohort meeting scheduling and deadline challenges, extensive group editing through Google Docs; and blending the individual contributions into a smooth, creative ensemble production that captivated the audience.

Finding 3 –ensemble publishable articles challenges. The Cohort 5 doctoral candidates were unfamiliar with the conventional formats for writing the publishable articles. The dissertation chair provided timely patient help of the development and editing process to ensure student comprehension and completion. Similar to the other dissertation projects such as the Comprehensive Literature Review, and doctoral information iBook, each cohort member (or partnered) wrote their own article, then presented it to the cohort via Google Docs, in person oral presentations, and in ooVoo meetings for collaborative purposes in future publications in book form.

Conclusions and Implications for Education

Through the curriculum of an Ed.D. program and the implementation of the capstone experience, doctoral candidates may develop the skills and knowledge necessary to become productive scholarly practitioners. In the pursuit of a group DiP, the following process implications were essential for 21st century educational leadership.

(1) A paradigm shift in the mindset of doctoral candidates and professors is necessary from a traditional dissertation to a nontraditional DiP.

(2) Relational trust must be established and maintained between cohort members, as well as between the cohort members and the DiP chair, and between the cohort members and critical friends.

(3) In efforts to collaboratively solve problems of practice, technological collaboration is essential for on and off campus when pursuing a group DiP.

Based on the study findings, further implications for education were identified.

(1) Attending a CPED consortium university gives access to a network of faculty, doctoral candidates, and encourages collaboration across institutions.

(2) Higher education Ed.D. programs infuse the concept of community involvement, 21st century learning skills, culturally responsive leadership, ethical and moral behavior and technology leadership throughout curriculum and coursework.

(3) Institutions of higher education must provide doctoral candidates with opportunities to demonstrate and

practice ethical behaviors when utilizing technological tools.

(4) Ed.D. programs prepare educational leaders for technological innovation and implementation within schools.

(5) Professional development is needed to ensure that the various components of technology leadership are implemented in the educational settings to maximize student achievement.

A subsequent article will analyze further research through ongoing conversations for the proposal defense for the nontraditional group DiP occurring at various times between October to December of 2014 based on cohort members' comments, perceptions, anxieties, concerns, and hopes reflecting their comprehension and recent discoveries of the inherent challenges of group student engagement to accomplish a nontraditional ensemble DiP.

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